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SUBJECT: PUBLIC FOOD DISTRIBUTION AND THE HARVEST IN
NORTHERN IRAQ

SUMMARY

1. WFP international staff will soon establish a full-time presence in Mosul, with responsibility also for At Tamim and Salah ad Din governorates. WFP, working with the MOT, is providing food to hospitals and social institutions in Mosul. WFP/Kirkuk reports that insecurity, salaries, and the need for MOT office equipment are the biggest obstacles limiting the quick revival of a successful PDS in At Tamim governorate. PUK officials in As Sulaymaniyah have expressed concern to WFP about the backlog of distributions and the need for retroactive distributions. Discussion is ongoing in the three northern governorates whether it is best for WFP to procure the wheat harvest as whole grain or wheat flour. End Summary.

MOSUL

2. The U.N. Security Coordinator (UNSECOORD) conducted a security assessment on 7 May of Mosul. U.N. World Food Program (WFP) program and logistics staff are now traveling daily to Mosul and Kirkuk. WFP is providing some support to Ministry of Trade (MOT) food offices in Mosul and Kirkuk (for example, two computers in each location) and minor repairs to grain storage structures. The WFP northern deputy responsible for Mosul and Kirkuk has arrived in Arbil and will likely move to Mosul this coming week. She will head up the team focusing on Ninawa and At Tamim governorates.

3. The DART traveled to Mosul on 5 May and met with WFP national staff, who reported that there is no shortage of food in the city of Mosul. WFP also noted that when security allows, they will conduct an assessment to look at pockets of vulnerability.

4. The Ministry of Trade (MOT) in Mosul on 12 May began to distribute non-WFP commodities to the 30 percent of the population who had not received March distributions (for August), which were interrupted by the war. The MOT in Kirkuk will similarly distribute wheat flour to the approximately 30 percent there who did not receive the August distribution in Ninawa. While cash is much more important right now than food, with the current absence of salaries, WFP believes that MOT distributions are appropriate. Food is available in the markets, but at approximately double pre-war prices. WFP and the MOT are distributing to hospitals and social institutions because there was concern that stocks were running dry.

5. WFP/Mosul reports that its relationship with Coalition Forces has been helpful. The Coalition has posted 35 soldiers to guard the WFP stores every night, and has recently provided WFP an additional 15,000 metric ton (MT) capacity warehousing complex since WFP's own 13,000 MT stores are now full. It contains 13,000 MT of wheat flour, together with 640 MT lentils, 91 MT weaning cereal, and 600 MT vegetable oil. The wheat flour is a little less than half that necessary for a normal monthly distribution in Ninawa. The second warehouse is being guarded by "local security." The Coalition Forces have also provided some fuel to WFP.

6. WFP national staff believe the public distribution system (PDS) has been the best mechanism for distribution - in terms of fairness, dignity, organization and timeliness - and should certainly be continued instead of setting up a

new system. Despite extensive looting of the MOT offices, its staff members saved disks with food/flour agent and beneficiary data, and the MOT local contract transporter (from main warehouses to each food/flour agent) is still available. This information, however, needs to be confirmed with the MOT.

KIRKUK

17. The DART traveled to Kirkuk on 8 May and met with WFP local staff. WFP/Kirkuk believes the silos and mills in the governorate are generally in good condition, and the Civil Military Operation Center (CMOC) personnel believe there is approximately 130,000 MT in governorate silos. A 300,000 MT harvest is due in the area next month. Coalition forces in Kirkuk arranged an initial meeting with the MOT heads of department on 6 May, an important step in reviving the entire MOT structure.

18. WFP raised concern regarding the shortage of fuel to enable farmers to bring their grain to market next month. CMOC personnel noted that the Bayji refinery should soon be repaired, allowing for sufficient fuel on the market in approximately two weeks time.

19. WFP/Kirkuk raised the following as the greatest constraints to quickly reviving the PDS: 1) Security of its warehouses, currently guarded by local security; 2) Replacement of MOT furniture and equipment that had been looted; and 3) Salaries of MOT staff. The nationwide \$20 emergency payments for each government employee are being provided in Kirkuk, but employees remain concerned about when they will receive their salaries and how much they will be paid.

AS SULAYMANIYAH

10. Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) government officials have expressed concern to WFP about the backlog of distributions and the need for retroactive distributions. (Note: While the rest of the country received double rations since last fall, the northern three governorates received wheat flour in single ration allotments, rather than double. End Note.)

11. WFP agrees this could be an extremely sensitive issue, given that the north has strongly supported the Coalition. At the same time, DART and WFP recognize it does not make sense to provide four-month flour rations (May through August) to northern populations, especially when the northern harvest looks promising.

MAKHMUR SILO IN ARBIL

12. The DART visited Makhmur silo in Arbil on 15 May. It has a capacity of 100,000 MT in addition to 60,000 to 70,000 MT of open storage (similar to large swimming pool-sized bins). The silo has been assessed by WFP and the Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), and requires some minor repairs to become functional, and larger repairs to be fully operational. The open storage, however, is usable immediately. WFP believes that with minimal input (approximately USD 25,000) the silo could handle approximately 40,000 MT. A much larger investment would be required to make it fully functioning (approximately USD 500,000). The surrounding fields of wheat and barley appear very good, and barley has just begun to be harvested.

13. The DART met with Coalition Forces, based at the silo, who are in charge of operations in Makhmur, a traditionally Kurdish farming area that had been "Arabized" over the last 12 years. In the past few weeks, many Kurds have returned to this part of Arbil district (which before the war was under GOI administration in Mosul) and have displaced a number of the Arab farmers who had settled there.

14. Coalition forces have been charged with enforcing an agreement made some days ago between the Arbil Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), Mosul authorities, and Makhmur leaders (and facilitated by the Coalition) that the previous Kurdish landowners and the Arabs who planted the current crop would share the harvest equally.

15. The Coalition has tasked helicopters to patrol the huge farming district and to arrest farmers who are currently harvesting barley. The Coalition forces are also confiscating machinery, until the farmer (primarily Kurdish now) can prove he owns the land, and agrees to share the harvest with any Arab who also has ownership documents. The process requires a visit to the agriculture office, where

the "harvest authorization" clearance process is conducted. It is reportedly straightforward and takes a short time, allowing the farmer to quickly return to harvesting.

16. Coalition forces hope that this campaign will persuade farmers to proactively seek clearance before harvesting. While acknowledging that this is a short-term solution, and there are a number of issues in the details (who pays for the harvesting, how is the 50 percent split effected, etc.), the Coalition views this as the best way to stave off violence and ensure that the current crop is harvested successfully. Thus far, it appears to be a successful campaign, although farmers have only begun to harvest barley; the real test will come in early June when the substantial wheat crop matures.

LOCAL PURCHASE

17. Between 1994 and 1995 WFP procured, through CARE, approximately 10,000 MT of wheat in the north. For the much larger quantities expected this year, WFP believes that it would be much easier to buy wheat flour in the north rather than wheat grain, to obviate the need for WFP to conduct pre-milling quality checks and undertake the milling itself. WFP indicates that its procedures require a tender, rather than working directly through the MOA. WFP is sending a procurement officer to the north in the coming days to explore the options.

18. By contrast, PUK ministry officials have suggested to WFP/Sulaymaniyah that wheat grain could be distributed rather than wheat flour from the harvest in the north. WFP says it has previously had bad experiences with private tenders for other goods when attempting to make a local purchase (as businessmen tend to pool and inflate rates). Consequently, WFP/Sulaymaniyah would prefer that the MOT's Grain Board procure wheat nationwide. WFP could then purchase from the Grain Board at a fixed rate.

19. According to WFP/Mosul, there may be some 250,000 MT of wheat grain in government silos within Ninawa governorate and 130,000 MT wheat in At Tamim governorate. These amounts need to be confirmed. This wheat is part of the National Strategic Reserve and falls under the jurisdiction of the MOT. If the MOT chose to do so, the wheat could be fed into the PDS.

JONES